THE NEW
# INDIAN EXPRESS

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**MS-O-METER**
**TAKE YOUR SHOT**
March 14 **17,11,867 doses**
March 15 **16,54,073 doses**
TOTAL DOSES
**1,80,58,30,502**

| NATIONWIDE | MAR 14 | MAR 15 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 2,503 | 2,568 |
| Recoveries | 4,377 | 4,722 |
| Deaths | 27 | 97 |

| KARNATAKA | MAR 14 | MAR 15 |
|---|---|---|
| Fresh cases | 106 | 129 |
| Recoveries | 337 | 206 |
| Deaths | 4 | 2 |

## *CHINA BACK IN LOCKDOWN AS REST OF THE WORLD OPENS UP*

**Fast-spreading 'stealth Omicron' variant forced Beijing to put 30 mn people across China under lockdown on Tuesday**

### ZERO-COVID APPROACH FAILS AS CASES DOUBLE

China reported 5,280 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, more than double the previous day's tally. Thirteen cities nationwide were fully locked down as of Tuesday, while several others had partial lockdowns. Shenzhen, the southern tech hub of 17.5 million people, is three days into a lockdown with factories closed and supermarket shelves emptying

### POPULOUS CITIES REEL UNDER CURBS

- Residents of Changchun, Shenzhen and Langfang are under stay-at-home orders, while Shanghai is under a lattice of curbs
- Dozens of domestic flights were cancelled on Tuesday, and aviation authorities said more than 100 international flights bound for Shanghai would be diverted to other cities

**15,000**
THE NUMBER OF COVID-19 CASES REPORTED IN CHINA SINCE MARCH 1

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# HC UPHOLDS GOVT BAN ON HIJAB IN COLLEGES

Headscarf not part of essential Islamic religious practice, says full bench

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN a significant and much-awaited judgement, the Karnataka High Court on Tuesday ruled that wearing of hijab or headscarf by Muslim women does not form part of an essential religious practice in Islamic faith protected under Article 25 (freedom of conscience) of the Indian Constitution, while upholding the contention of the state government. Confirming the order issued by the state government on February 5, 2022, banning hijab in classrooms and prescribing uniforms, the court categorically stated that the government has powers to issue such an order and no case was made out by petitioners for its invalidation.

Prescribing uniforms for students is not a violation of the fundamental right to freedom of expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) and right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution, concluded the full bench of Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, Justices Krishna S Dixit and JM Khazi.

Prescribing uniforms is only a reasonable restriction constitutionally permissible which the students cannot object to. "We have no quarrel with the petitioners' essential proposition that what one desires to wear is a facet of one's autonomy and that one's attire is one's expression. But all that is subject to reasonable regulation," the bench added on privacy rights.

"There is absolutely no material placed on record to prima facie show that wearing of hijab is part of an essential religious practice in Islam and that the petitioners have been wearing hijab from the beginning. This apart, it can hardly be argued that hijab being a matter of attire, can be justifiably treated as fundamental to Islamic faith. It is not that if the alleged practice of wearing hijab is not adhered to, those not wearing hijab become sinners, Islam loses its glory and ceases to be a religion, the full bench opined. **CONTINUED ON: P4**

Eight II PU students of Government Junior College at Kembhavi in Yadgir district return home as college authorities did not allow them to write exams wearing hijab on Tuesday | EXPRESS

## Petition filed in Supreme Court

New Delhi: Two Muslim girl students from MGM College in Udupi on Tuesday filed a special leave petition before the Supreme Court, soon after the Karnataka High Court passed a judgement upholding the state government ban on hijab in schools and colleges. The plea, filed by Manal and Niba Naz, states that the high court failed to note that the right to wear a hijab comes under the ambit of 'expression' and is protected under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution

## Students must not skip classes, exams, says CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

SOON after the Karnataka High Court passed its judgement upholding the state government ban on hijab in schools and colleges, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Tuesday appealed to students not to skip classes and exams.

Education is important and it is a question of their future, he said.

Everyone has to follow the court order and people should maintain peace while it is being implemented, he said. The government has made enough security arrangements and action will be taken against those violating the order, he said.

Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh said that the government is looking at bringing in amendments to remedy the lacunae in law.

# 3 European PMs go on solidarity trip to Kyiv

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

EVEN as Russia continued to reduce Ukrainian cities to rubble, three European prime ministers set out for the embattled capital by train on Tuesday. The aim of the trip, undertaken independently by the leaders after the European Union refused to sanction it due to security risks, is to show support for Ukraine, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala tweeted. He was joined by his counterparts Janez Jansa of Slovenia and Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland. Polish deputy PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski also joined them.

This is the first high-level visit since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24. The development comes amid Russia's relentless bombardment on Ukraine. On Tuesday, central Kyiv witnessed a series of attacks in a residential neighbourhood. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy said four multi-storey buildings were hit, killing dozens of people.

The trip comes at a time when Ukrainian authorities have expressed hope that the war could end sooner than expected. In the latest hint at a compromise, Zelenskyy said on Tuesday that Kyiv is ready to accept security guarantees that stop short of its long-term objective of the NATO alliance membership.

Meanwhile, the European Union on Tuesday approved the fourth package of sanctions against Russia, which includes economic and personal restrictive measures. **P12**

## Sonia begins clean-up, tells Sidhu, four other PCC chiefs to resign

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

AFTER a humiliating whitewash in all five states that went to polls recently, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday directed the heads of party units in UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur to put in their papers. The directive is expected to set the ball rolling for spring cleaning and rejuvenating the party units.

"Congress President, Smt Sonia Gandhi has asked the PCC (Pradesh Congress Committee) Presidents of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur to put in their resignations in order to facilitate reorganisation of PCCs," party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted.

The order came two days after Sonia reportedly offered to resign along with her children at the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting but was dissuaded from doing so by her loyalists. The CWC instead asked her to "address the organisational weaknesses, effect necessary and comprehensive organisational changes in order to take on the political challenges."

The Congress was particularly bruised because it was swept out of power in Punjab by the AAP due to intra-party squabbling. It also failed to catch the low-hanging fruits of Uttarakhand and Goa, and let the BJP win repeat mandates in four of the five states that went to polls.

Sonia's diktat would bring the curtain down on the messy Navjot Singh Sidhu chapter in Punjab Congress. Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra and Rahul Gandhi used the maverick to unseat the then chief minister Amarinder Singh, but instead of making him the successor, passed on the baton to Charanjit Singh Channi. Sidhu kept sulking and continued to be a rebel despite being given charge of the Punjab unit.

A section of the party leaders had said the in-charge of the five states that went to polls should be made equally accountable and asked to tender their resignations. **P9**

## Kept dynastic politics out in BJP, says Modi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a fresh shot at dynastic politics, saying he specifically denied tickets to the wards of party MPs in the recent state elections since dynasty is dangerous for democracy.

"A number of MPs and party leaders were trying to get tickets for their children. Many of them didn't get it because it would have otherwise meant perpetuating dynastic politics," Modi said at the BJP's parliamentary party meeting here. He said upfront he took the tough call and even shared his reasoning with those MPs.

Not everyone was happy though, as one such ambitious son of a UP-based senior leader and MP, Rita Bahuguna Joshi, recently joined the SP after he was denied a ticket to contest the Assembly election in UP.

While he did not mention the Congress or SP in his address, the attack was clearly targeted at them. **P10**

**EXPRESS READ**

### SC stays ban on MediaOne telecast

New Delhi: The SC on Tuesday stayed the Jan 31 directive of the Centre revoking licence of Malayalam news channel MediaOne and banning its telecast on security grounds. A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud, Surya Kant and Vikram Nath said the channel will continue operations as it was operating prior to the ban | **P7**

**WAR EFFECT**

## Fully built houses may cost 15% more

ENS @ Bengaluru

THE Russia-Ukraine war is likely to push up prices of fully constructed residential dwellings by around 15 per cent from April 1, the beginning of next financial year.

Bhaskar Nagendrappa, president, Bengaluru Chapter of Confederation of Real Estate Developers of India (CREDAI) said there has been a record increase in steel, cement and construction material prices. The cost of crude oil and gases has gone up globally due to the war and any increase in fuel prices negatively impacts the sector, he said. **P2**

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